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Professional sports teams & the community: a comparative case study of two professional basketball teams

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Professional Sports Teams & The Community:

a comparative case study of two professional basketball teams

Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies Creative Component

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PURPOSE:

All organizations are unique in their individual goals and aspirations. However, often is the case that organizations within the same industry share perspectives and overarching themes regarding how they go about achieving their perspective goals. In my paper, I will be comparing two professional basketball organizations that from first glance have very little, if anything, in similar besides the fact that they are both professional basketball teams. Through my research and personal experiences, I aim to answer the question of whether or not two professional basketball organizations are more alike in their community engagement and involvement than we would assume based upon their differences in size, financials, and locations. I hope to show that while different in so many ways, the end goal of building a brand through community outreach is possible regardless of whether it is with a small town basketball organization in Germany or one of the biggest sports franchises in one of the biggest cities in the world.

I define community engagement as the process of working hand in hand with the people of your given community in an attempt to improve the well-being of individuals and the subsequent entire community. I will look to achieve these aforementioned goals by use of a case study analysis method. By using this method I am comparing two basketball organizations and their community engagement efforts, one of which being a smaller market team in a developing league and the other being a very well established team in a very well established league.

INSPIRATION:

I came up with this topic for many reasons. First and foremost, I am a professional basketball player for one of the teams mentioned in my paper, Mitteldeutscher Basketball Club. Thus, my first-hand experience being a part of the club and in volunteering in the community as

a player has given me valuable insight as to the power and value that community outreach has. On the other side of the spectrum, my girlfriend works as a fan development and community relations manager for the New York Rangers of the NHL. Hearing her daily responsibilities and first-hand impact that she experiences with the community outreach of a franchise giant such as the NY Rangers, I felt this was the perfect comparative case study. Because of my unique position to have insider information and contacts within both my basketball club and the colleagues of my girlfriend at the NY Knicks (both NY Rangers and NY Knicks are owned and operated by MSG Sports Company and both operate together in the MSG business offices), I felt as if I had to take on this project.

MITTELDEUTSCHER BASKETBALL CLUB (MBC):

BACKGROUND

The Mitteldeutscher Basketball Club, MBC, is a professional basketball organization in the town of Weissenfels, Germany. The town is located in former East Germany and is roughly 30 miles Southwest of the large German city of Leipzig, population of over 500,000 people. The



town of Weissenfels itself is much smaller, with an estimated population of just over 40,000 people (40,874 when calculated at the end of 2017) located within the 43 square mile town limit (Statistiken-Sachsen-Anhalt.de).

During the 1900s, the town's primary industry was shoe manufacturing until the final factory closed in 1991 following the opening of the

wall separating East and West Germany. Since then, food processing has become the largest industry with a nearby meat processing plant being the single largest employer of the people of Weissenfels. The Mitteldeutscher Basketball Club has a rather short basketball history, being founded and first joining the top professional basketball division in Germany in 1999. The team plays its home games in the Stadthalle Weissenfels. The arena has a spectator capacity of 3,000, the smallest in the league, and averaged just under 2500 fans per game for the 2017-18 season based upon the league website (Easycrredit-BBL.de). Constructed in 2002 the arena is said to have cost just over 8 million euro (present day value of approximately 9.1 million US dollars)



(Weissenfels.de). The Stadthalle, literally translates to ‘town gym’ in German, serves as a multipurpose arena, being a home gym to not only the MBC basketball team but also the local floorball team (sport is described as being a type of floor hockey on an indoor surface). Alongside the floorball team, the arena is also used as a location for a multitude of different functions ranging from hosting concerts and boxing matches, to being used as a physical education gym for the local middle and high school.

back into the BBL after winning the Pro-A during the 2008-09 season. The team was twice more relegated to the Pro-A for the 2011-12 and 2016-17 seasons; however, in each case was promoted back up to the BBL in the following seasons, where the team has remained since the beginning of the 2017-18 season. The BBL has grown in the number of teams since the league has 14 teams when MBC first joined during the 99-00. The league grew to 15 teams for the 03-04 season and then to 18 teams for the 09-10 season, where it remains to this date. As an organization, MBC has not qualified for the playoffs, comprised of the top eight teams at the end of the regular season, since it went to two straight playoffs in their first two seasons in the BBL, 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 seasons. However, since the 2000-01 season in which they finished 7th out of 14 teams, MBC has only finished in the top 10 of the BBL once, finished 9th out of 18 teams during the 2013-14 season, and has yet to finish higher than 6th place since first joining the BBL in 1999.

NEW YORK KNICKS

BACKGROUND

The New York Knicks, formerly known as the Knickerbockers, is a professional basketball organization located in Manhattan, the most densely populated of the five boroughs that make up New York City. With a population of over 1.5 million people, Manhattan, New York is one of the most densely populated areas in the world given its modest size of 22 square miles (NYC.gov). According to travel+leisure.com Manhattan is home to three of the world's top

ten most visited tourist attractions in Time Square, Central Park, and Grand Central Terminal (Travel+Leisure.com). The island of Manhattan is often considered the cultural, financial, media, and entertainment capital of the world. This is determined based upon many factors such as Manhattan being home to the two largest stock exchanges by market capitalization in the New York Stock Exchange, NYSE, and the NASDAQ. Manhattan is also home to the United Nations



headquarters, international news headquarters, some of the most expensive real estate in the world, as well as being the setting for countless books, television shows, and movies. The New York Knicks are one of two teams in New York

City since the Brooklyn Nets moved from New Jersey to Brooklyn New York following the 2011-12 NBA season. The Knicks play their home games in the famed Madison Square Garden located in Midtown Manhattan directly on top of New York Penn Station, the busiest railroad station in the Western Hemisphere (Leonard, 2018). Madison Square Garden, or MSG, was constructed in 1968 and including two renovations, MSGs total constructions costs are estimated at 1.1 billion (Esteban, 2011).

The Knicks currently share MSG with the New York



Rangers of the National Hockey League, NHL. The arena is also used for concerts, circuses, boxing fights, wrestling, college graduations, and much more. In 2019, MSG was considered the

second busiest music arena, based upon ticket sales, in the entire world (Chapple, 2019). During Knicks basketball games, MSG has a seating capacity of 19,812 and along with the Knicks, are the Boston Celtics are the only two original NBA teams that are still located in their respective city (Esteban, 2011).

KNICKS BASKETBALL HISTORY

The Knicks were established in 1946 as one of the founding members of the Basketball Association of America (BAA), which later became the National Basketball Association (NBA) after the merger with the National Basketball League (NBL) in 1949. The team competes in the Atlantic Division of the Eastern Conference of the NBA, the top basketball league in the world. The Knicks have a rich basketball history having won two NBA championships, eight Eastern



Conference titles, and having had countless Basketball Hall of Fame players or coaches a part of the Knicks organization. The Knicks were very successful in the early years of the NBA making constant playoff appearances cultivating with their NBA championships in

1970 and 1973. Led by future Hall of Fame player and native New Yorker Patrick Ewing, who was drafted by the team in 1985, the team saw a consistent success reaching the playoffs in each year from the 1987-88 season through the 2000-01 season. During this span, behind their perennial superstar Ewing, the Knicks were still unable to return to the very top, losing in the NBA finals in the 1994 and 1999. Much of the reason for the lack of championships during this

glory era of Knicks basketball has been attributed simply to unlucky timing. During that same span, a man by the name of Michael Jordan was playing and becoming the face of basketball across the world, leading his Chicago Bulls, who were alongside the Knicks in the NBA Eastern Conference, to six NBA Championships from 1991 to 1998. This time span included a



stronghold on the conference by the Jordan led Bulls that included two separate three peat Eastern Conference and NBA Championship runs, 1991-93 and 1996-98. Following the success of the Ewing led 90s, the Knicks have struggled to ignite the same type of success that the historic franchise had become so accustomed to. Since a first round playoff appearance in 2001, the Knicks have made the playoffs only four totals times in the 17 following seasons, and this season are once again in a position to miss the playoffs. In the four playoff appearances since 2001, the team only reached the second round once, and won a total of 5 games in those four playoff appearances, twice being swept (losing the 7 game playoff series 4-0), and once losing the series 4-1. The most recent playoff appearance was in 2013, when they were able to win a playoff series for the first time since 2000, where they eventually lost in the second round.

THE BUSINESSES:

MBC

The Mitteldeutscher Basketball Club, MBC, is reported to having a working budget of around 2.3 million euros (approx. \$2.6 million) for the 2018-19 season (Kattner, 2018). The

budget is just over the minimum of 2.2 million euro allowed to remain in the league and thus is subsequently one of the lowest in the entire German BBL and drastically behind that of the league giants such as Bamberg and Bayern Munich, who operate with a reported budget of 18 million euros, approximately \$20 million (Kattner, 2018). The league as a whole, with the intent on becoming the premier European domestic basketball league, has been year after year increasing various standards including the minimum budget allowed to remain in the league as well as arena size requirements. For the upcoming 2019-20 season, the league has announced that one of the requirements league wide is a minimum budget of three million euros (approx.. \$3.4 million), a feat MBC is currently working with sponsors to achieve (Kattner, 2018). The overall size of the organization is rather small having only 10 employees working in the front office ranging from the general manager to the public relations. Given the small size of the town and employee base it is no surprise that the teams estimated budget for the 2018-19 season was 2.2 million euros and breaking even when considering all sponsors and revenue.

NY KNICKS

The NY Knicks, valued at \$4 billion, are the most valuable NBA franchise for the fourth straight year, and tied with the NY Yankees as the second most valuable United States sports franchise behind only the Dallas Cowboys, who are valued at \$5 billion dollars (Badenhausen, 2019). According to Forbes, the NBA as a whole has seen team values grow for the past five years (Badenhausen, 2019). In 2019, the average NBA team is worth \$1.9 billion dollars, which is up 13% over the previous year (Badenhausen, 2019). The Cavaliers are the only franchise to decline in value from last year, dropping 4% to \$1.28 billion (Badenhausen, 2019). However, this drop can undoubtedly be directly attributed to the LeBron James effect of him leaving for the Los Angeles Lakers this past offseason, subsequently leading to less fans, sponsors, and

television revenue as the team rebuilds without the world's best basketball player in their team. The total NBA revenue was over \$8 billion last season, an increase of 8.5% from the previous year (Badenhausen, 2019). To go with the crazy high values of NBA franchises and league revenue are the ever-increasing team revenues and profits. According to Forbes, the Cleveland Cavaliers have been the only NBA franchise, out of the 30 teams in the NBA, not to turn a profit the past two seasons (Badenhausen, 2019). Forbes calculated that the average EBITDA (Earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization) for NBA teams was \$61 million, a number that has doubled from the average two seasons ago (Badenhausen, 2019). For the 2017-18 season, in which they won only 29 out of 82 games, the Knicks still boasted a revenue of \$443 million and EBITDA of \$155 million, which was up from \$140 million the prior year (Badenhausen, 2019). With an average attendance of 19,332 per game during the 2017-18 season and one of the league's highest average ticket price of \$130 dollars, it is no wonder that the franchise is able to remain such a profitable business while not having made the playoffs since 2013 (Badenhausen, 2019). Given the staggering value and revenue of the NY Knicks it is no surprise they boast \$50 of revenue per resident of New York City or \$260 of revenue per resident of Manhattan alone.

COMMUNITY EFFORTS:

MBC

Being a member of the MBC basketball organization as a current player, I have a lot of personal experience as to the community outreach and perspective as to how powerful it can be to people both old and young. Working hand in hand with MBC front office employee Tonio Bierhoff, public relations and marketing, I was able to gain behind the curtain access into the

many different outreach programs that MBC leads including the reasoning and aim behind these programs. While there is not a team of six people, like with the Knicks, designated as fan development and community relations coordinators, it is still apparent that community outreach and support at a grass roots level is just as important in developing a strong brand and subsequently helping the bottom line of the MBC Club as a business. Given the fact that the arena in Weissenfels holds 3000 fans, it takes roughly 7.5% of the town population to fill the arena. This may seem absurdly high when it comes to an entire town population for one single event, but when you consider the fact that MBC is the only ‘show’ in town so to say, it leads each game or event put on by MBC to be a big deal in town. While the Knicks have a more diverse outreach program fueled by statistics and league wide initiatives, MBC takes a more basic approach into their community programs and goals. The community events and programs put on by MBC are the Kinder+Sport Basketball Academy, Night of Baskets & Prevention Activities at Schools, AOK Youth Camp, and MIBRAG School Sport Project.

Kinder+Sport Basketball Academy

The Kinder+Sport Basketball Academy’s aim according to Bierhoff is “fun through being active while bringing kids close to basketball”. Supported and funded by the global sweets

company Ferrero, MBC is one of 13 German professional basketball teams that take part in



the initiative. Through the program, kids learn basketball techniques and skills. Each year MBC has roughly 4000 youth partake in the academy. Through the program, kids can take ‘skills tests’ to earn points with the hopes of leveling. Upon each level increase, the youth get a new Kinder+Sport Basketball Academy jersey, the highest level being a black jersey, to honor their achievement as they continue to improve their basketball skills and knowledge. From direct experience volunteering at various Kinder+Sport Basketball Academy events, I could see how Ferrero and MBC do a great job of providing incentives to aid in keeping kids active, while also teaching them about the game. The level system with different colored jerseys also give the kids an added motivation to remain active outside of the events and continue to learn and practice basketball as they all hope to get the coveted ‘black jersey’. Kids love the competitive challenges and the overarching idea that there are rewards each step of the way as they improve their skills while simultaneously having fun with their friends.

Night of Baskets & Prevention Activities at Schools

Night of Baskets and Prevention Activities at Schools are programs designed by MBC in conjunction with the local police department two to three times per season to promote a healthy lifestyle and offer a role model example as to how to behave as a young adult. These events are geared towards young adults and older high school students. The goal of the panel and small group discussions are to engage in personal discussions regarding anti-violence goals and drug awareness education. The key is to use other young adults, MBC players and coaches, to give real life accounts as to why bullying, sexual assault, and drug use are all serious and



dangerous issues. Being that this message and group discussions are led by MBC players and coaches, it allows the conversations to be more casual instead of having adult police officers preaching different lessons that often goes unheard by younger audiences. Giving real life examples from either mistakes we personally have made, or things that we have seen happen to others carries much more weight and leaves a lasting impact of the kids we talk with. To end the panels and discussions we give out tickets to upcoming games, offer to take photos and sign autographs, as well as give out our contact info to any of the kids who may have questions or would like to speak more regarding guidance relating to anti-violence or drug prevention with us outside of the event. While these topics are a must, they can often go on deaf ears if they are not addressed in the proper manner. People always relate better when real life examples are used and there are few things more personal than giving real life examples of mistakes coming from someone who you look up to or are of similar age and background.

AOK Youth Camp

The AOK Youth Camp occurs once per season at the Stadthalle for over 100 kids. Run by AOK, the main health partner of MBC and one of the largest health insurance companies in Germany, its aim is to promote healthy living and connect the idea of living a healthy lifestyle with having fun. The program runs for an entire afternoon and is filled with events led by players, coaches, and other MBC front office workers in which the kids are taught basketball



skills, play other physically active games, and have nutrition coaching stations and group talks about healthy eating and living. At the conclusion of the afternoon, each of the kids will receive a goody bag, provided by AOK and MBC that contains different healthy living takeaways and reminders for the kids as well as home game tickets. The AOK Youth Camp is a great way for us players, coaches, and staff members to engage with youth and give an example as a way to live an overall healthy lifestyle. We share with kids on exercise and eating habits as well as discuss topics such as sleep, electronics use, and how all these topics are interconnected with overall well-being and a healthy living lifestyle.

MIBRAG School Sport Project

The MIBRAG School Sport Project has many different functions and goals ranging from teaching basketball skills, engaging youth and peaking their interest in basketball, and most importantly creating special moments. The project has current players for MBC attend



kindergarten through high schools and engage with the kids through different activities such as basketball drills, games of tag. They always ending with a group picture as well signing autographs and taking photos with the kids. MIBRAG, a regional high tech mining and energy company and large sponsor of MBC, is the sole sponsor of the project and helps in creating different gift giveaways including hats and tickets to upcoming MBC home games. It was estimated that per season the MIBRAG School Sport Project reaches close to 500 students.

Of all the community outreach events that MBC engages in this is by far my favorite and one with the greatest impact in my eyes. As an example, I had the great opportunity to volunteer at a school and met a young boy named Giaco, pictured below. Giaco was rather quiet and kept to himself for the first 15 or so minutes as he is overweight, and as I later learned gets picked on by



other kids. As soon as I saw Giaco alone I made an extra effort to engage with him, as we are all told and encouraged to find a single or group of kids and hang out and get to know them. To these young kids, especially the youngest groups, hanging out with us ‘professional basketball players’ that they see on TV

or at games is something like a dream. They often look at us as if we were super heroes, which as athletes we take for granted. As for Giaco, the more I spoke with him the more he opened up. At first he was shy, and rightfully so, being that I am 6 foot 8, I tower over him which can be intimidating for a young child. However, as time went on in no time he was the life of the party and leading a giant game of tag. The reason I point out Giaco is what happened in the following days and weeks. I did not know this, but since I attended his school over six months ago, he has come to every single one of our home games. He begs his mother, and tells me about it in a weekly pump up message he sends me via his mother’s Instagram account, to let him come to the games. It was after the first game following our school visit that I finally realized how much of a direct impact we have on the youth and subsequent community. Following the game, I noticed the short chubby blonde haired kid I had recently played tag with and went up to him. I went in for a high five and thanked Giaco for his support in coming to our game. He was so dumbfounded that I remembered his name and that I was thanking him that he just stood there

and was speechless. I kept talking and asked if he would want a picture and autograph and his response will forever be engrained in my memory, he cried. Following the photo he gave me a giant hug, tears rolling down his cheek, saying that today had been the best day of his life. It did not hit me until a few minutes later, as I was back in our locker-room, what had just happened. This was all a result of me spending a few hours hanging out with a group of kids, shooting hoops, and playing tag. His mother tells me that I literally changed his life. Since then, he still sends me pump up messages via Instagram a few days before each game and before each home games he writes to tells me about how he once more begged his mother to let him come to the game. I



still see him and talk with him after every home game and take a photo for his records. Though I always knew the power of community outreach on people, especially kids, Giaco showed me again the effect that we as athletes or other role models can have on people. His mother keeps me updated with photos of Giaco playing other sports or holding up good test scores from school. She credits MBC and the school sports project for a newfound joy in her sons life, constantly saying how many people she told about the good work MBC does in the community and how her entire family will be MBC fans for life.

NY KNICKS

Given the astounding size of the Knicks and New York City, it makes sense that they employ a team of six designated solely for fan development and community relations. I was able to speak with Jonathan Ochoa, Fan Development and Community Relations coordinator, who stated how the



“Knicks community programs aim to leverage the power of sport to do the most good. We believe when our communities are strengthened, so too is our brand.” According to Ochoa, their programs are designed with both community and business objectives at the forefront of everything they do, and nothing is more powerful than building strong brand awareness. He goes on to mention how “[the Knicks] efforts in the community

address key issues, important to our fans and beneficiaries, under three cause areas: celebrating diversity and empowering communities, recognizing heroes, and stewarding youth education and mentorship”. They have found that there is a dual benefit to community outreach. Not only does it build strong communities by giving back in hours of service and resources but it also enables the Knicks brand to grow at a grass roots level. Their program annual summary briefing states how they “build and sustain the next generation of Knicks fans by increasing the positive touchpoints we have with program participants”.

In an attempt to help promote the NBA as an entire league, the NBA helps teams by conducting research for each individual team each season regarding different factors that drive brand image and appeal and quantify the importance and value of branding for each franchise. They found that “nearly 9 of 10 sports fans in the New York market believe sports franchises and athletes should use their platforms to improve their communities. However, 82% of these people

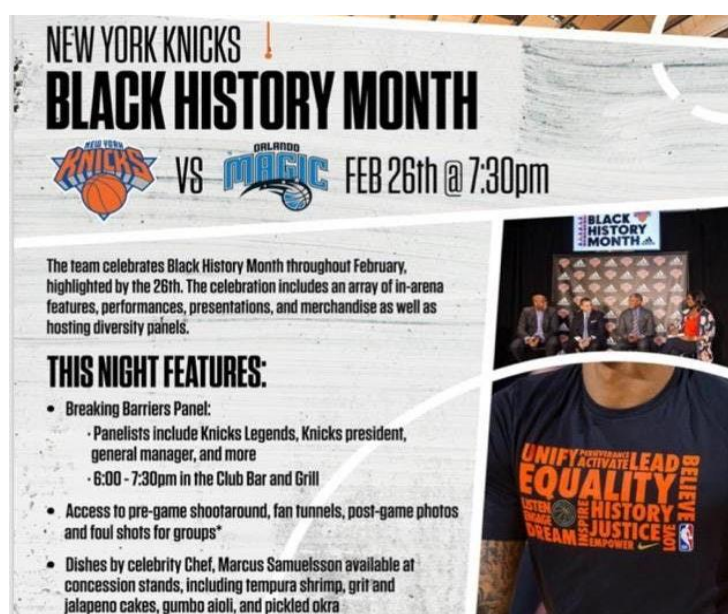
are unaware of any community involvement programs led by the Knicks”. This is a staggering number given the outreach data by the Knicks and is mostly likely attributed to the fact that no matter how much community outreach one does in New York City, it is impossible to ever truly reach a substantial number of people given its vast amount of people and other attractions. In 2017, the population per square mile of the island of Manhattan alone was 72,918 (NYC.gov). This means that if the Knicks held a community outreach event in which they filled every one of their 19,518 seats in MSG it would take nearly four separate community events with full MSG capacity to engage the average population of one square mile of Manhattan. Given the fact that Manhattan is only the third largest of the five boroughs that make up New York City, it simply goes to show the immense size of the Knicks market audience and fan base because of the size of New York City.



This all being said, according to their data, the outreach done by the Knicks is remarkable and necessary, as evident by the number of staff members they have working full time simply on fan development and community relations. I was able to acquire the programs and numbers regarding the Knicks community impact for the current 2018-19 NBA season from Ochoa. As previously mentioned, the community programs of the Knicks have three distinct causes they aim to address: Celebrating diversity and empowering communities, recognizing heroes, and stewarding youth education and mentorship, all of which I discuss below.

1. Celebrating Diversity & Empowering Communities

For this cause area, the Knicks participated in Black History Month, Season of Giving, and CommUNITY Cities. Black History Month “is a staple in our community portfolio and through comprehensive strategies and activation, we honor black culture by leveraging Knicks assets and values” according to Ochoa. He goes on to say how they use “key themes including education, community enrichment, and recognizing the people and place that have made and



currently make Black History every day” adding that they “accomplish these goals through pillars of cultivating, celebrating, and contributing to our local communities”. Among the many different events that take place under the Black History Month platform are the MLK Jr. Junior Kicks Youth

Basketball clinic. The program takes place during MLK day for 75 inner city kids and celebrates diversity and inclusion. There is also an event put on in collaboration with the technology company EverFi for 500 local high school to implement and execute a Black History school curriculum, as well as put on a student expression contest in multiple NYC high schools. There is also a pregame panel on diversity in sports and business for 200 young as well as a youth leadership event



for 300 high school aged students, which is led by a panel of current and former Knicks players. The last two events are very important to the Knicks organization because the Knicks are the only NBA franchise who are led by two African Americans in President Steve Mills and General Manager Scott Perry. Thus, when it comes to celebrating diversity and empowering communities, Mills, a native New Yorker, and Perry, from the inner city of Detroit, often take part in the events first-hand and make sure to not only focus on the youth when it comes to celebrating diversity and inclusion but also focus their efforts on young and adult professionals.

The Season of Giving is an NBA platform that takes place from November 20th through December 25th and encourages teams to give back to local communities during the winter and holiday season. The events include coaching staff, players, corporate and local sponsors and partners, as well as alumni of the Knicks hosting a Thanksgiving dinner party for 250 families, holding a holiday gaming night for close to 200 youth, as well as taking part in a community cooking class.



Lastly, the CommUNITY Cities program is one in which the Knicks work directly with



sponsor Squarespace in conjunction with the NYC Parks and Recreation Department to teach youth about important pieces of New York City that are directly connected with the Knicks brand. These programs include things such as working with the NYC Parks

and Rec Department to select and refurbish a court in a community that is in most need of improvement. This is subsequently followed by a ribbon cutting ceremony and hosted event for over 200 community members and youth to celebrate the newly Knicks branded outdoor community hub.

2. Recognizing Heroes

A key component of the Knicks brand has to do with the fact that they have such a rich basketball tradition. Through their programs designed to recognize certain individuals, they are attempting to connect the past greats of the Knicks with the current individuals who through the eyes of the Knicks have done extraordinary feats. The first of the programs is known as the Sweetwater Clifton ‘city spirit’ Award. The awards program, started during the 2004-05 season and given monthly during the season, is given to “local heroes who have made a significant



difference in the lives of others through their community involvement and who epitomize the same trailblazing characteristics of the late Nat ‘Sweetwater’ Clifton”, the first African

American Knicks player who passed away in 1990. The recipients are recognized on-court during a Knicks home game and are presented a trophy along with a \$5,000 donation to a charity of the winners choice.

Hoops for Troops awards are also a very import portion of the Knicks community outreach programs. Through Hoops for Troops theme nights, the Knicks award three service

members and their families each season with on-court recognition and presentation as well as gifting the families different Knicks experiences, which can include all access passes, signed memorabilia or other behind the scenes Knicks experiences. The



award platform is created to celebrate the service member's contributions and sacrifices as well as pay homage to local active and retired military heroes and their families.

3. Stewarding Youth Education & Mentorship

In partnership with Chase, one of their biggest sponsors, the Knicks are currently in the



second year of running their Knicks BUILD program. BUILD is centered around entrepreneurship and experiential learning for youth in under-resourced communities. In just their first year of the program, BUILD was, according to the Knicks annual community

outreach report, able to “increase on-time high school graduation rates, enhance student engagement and enrich learning” across seven schools in New York City. Both Chase and Knicks employees, including Knicks general manager Scott Perry and current Knicks players, were the ones



volunteering and running the program by helping students with their pitch ideas and final pitch presentations.

Junior Knicks

The last big community and youth program is the Junior Knicks. It is a program in conjunction with the league wide Jr. NBA. Each NBA, WNBA, and NBA G-League (the equivalent of a minor league or developmental league for the NBA) teams have a subsequent



‘Jr.’ program. Ochoa describes the Jr. Knicks as a way to “grow the next generation of Knicks fans through providing safe, educational and character-building youth basketball programs and equip basketball leaders with tools and resources to provide positive experiences”. There are over 6000 Jr. Knicks members

across all five of the NYC boroughs with an average age of 10. There were about 50,000 youth impacted through the different events, clinic, or camps put on by the Jr. Knicks during the 2017-18 season. The Jr. Knicks is a great way for youth to learn the game of basketball and compete in games while being instructed and coached by both current and former Knicks players. To top it all off, the kids also get the opportunity to play in MSG on the very same court that the Knicks play on.



CONCLUSION:

At a brief glance, the New York Knicks and MBC Wolves have nothing in common other than the fact that they are both professional basketball organizations. One is located in the heart Manhattan, New York City, widely regarded as one of the most powerful city in the world, with the other being located in Weissenfels, Germany, a small town in former East Germany. One organization is a founding member of the NBA and has multiple NBA championships, while the other joined the BBL, top professional basketball league in Germany, in 1999 and has been relegated multiple times for poor performance and also once relegated for financial struggles. One organization has a team of six employees designated solely for fan development and community relations, while the other employs 11 people for their front office and has no single person designated solely for community relations or fan development.

All the above facts are regarding how different the two organizations are on paper. However, after careful dissection of the programs, initiatives, and end goals of the MBC and Knicks community outreach, it is clear that their grass roots goal of strengthening their personal brand, teaching the game of basketball, and promoting healthy living through athletics is one in the same. When comparing the more robust overall community outreach of MBC vs the Knicks it can be contributed to many factors. First and foremost, unlike the Knicks, the market size of MBC is rather small and thus MBC can even be considered as having a lack of competition in terms of other games, community events, or other large functions as the basketball club is the biggest and main attraction provider in the town. The Knicks have the opposite problem. In New York City you not only have a second NBA franchise in the Brooklyn Nets but you also have multiple NHL franchises (NY Rangers and NY Islanders) and Major League Baseball Franchises (NY Yankees and NY Mets), not even to mention the unlimited amount of other entertainment

events that occur 24/7, 365 in the city. This, unlike for MBS in Weissenfels, forces the Knicks to fight for fans and subsequent customers. Therefore, although the two have different challenges in creating brand loyalty, they both utilize the dual beneficial means of community outreach to help people and the community better themselves, as well as building their own business by simultaneously increasing their fan base and revenue. What both organizations understand very well is the fact that spending time and money investing in the community, when done well, can ultimately lead to increases in their own business bottom line.

Given my personal accounts, most notably the narrative I shared regarding the young fan Giaco, I believe that the creation of these memorable experiences for fans, both youth and adults, in which they interact and talk with the players, coaches, or executives creates a lasting impact that cannot be quantified. Both the Knicks and MBC utilize this by having their players, coaches, and executives actively take part in the community programs and events. The most rewarding for both parties in community outreach is with the youth. From the business perspective, by bonding and building a positive relationship between a child and a brand, you immediately have a long-term asset in place to continually cultivate across decades, which will only appreciate and raise in value. As a parent of a child, all you want is to see your child happy. Thus, by placing a large emphasis on youth outreach in the community, MBC and the Knicks are actively trying to create lifelong fans that are very young while at the same time cashing in on their adult fan as the parents will support programs and organizations that are bettering the lives of their children and making them happy. A great example of this is the mother of Giaco, who vows her family will be MBC fans for life. From a community development and social betterment perspective, by creating this bond with the youth regarding life skills and other important life lessons, you are

laying a strong foundation to foster a stronger, more resilient, and healthier all around community.

Based upon my analysis of both organizations during this case study, I have not only deepened my knowledge of each of their community outreach goals and motivations but I have also learned a few things about myself and those who are in the same position as I am fortunate to be in. Given my status as a professional basketball player, I always understood my impact on people. However, it often takes an interaction and ensuing friendship with someone like Giaco to really appreciate and comprehend how powerful our position in the community can be. Going forward, I would also like to give some advice to MBC given the knowledge of the Knicks community outreach efforts. While MBC does not have the financial backing as the Knicks, I would suggest that they aim to increase their organization resources towards community outreach. Having a team of six employees solely responsible for this like the Knicks is unrealistic. That being said, getting creative in job descriptions, seasonal hiring, or even part time employment solely responsible for community outreach would do wonders to continue to build up the community and MBC brand as a whole. As can be seen first-hand by MBC's community outreach efforts, an increase in emphasis on this can surely reciprocate to a greater return in terms of revenue and sales, not to mention greater brand loyalty and awareness.

To end, the Knicks community outreach annual report put it best when it described the end goal of community and fan development as a means to “build and sustain the next generation of Knicks fans by increasing the positive touchpoints we have with program participants” (Ochoa, 2019). If you were to think this notion of ‘positive touchpoints with program participants’ is just a fluff saying by corporations to get sponsorships or for good publicity I urge you to reconsider. If you do not believe me then simply reach out to my friend Giaco or his

mother, or any one of the hundreds of thousands of people who have taken part in the Knicks community events or programs over the years. I guarantee you they will all relay the same message. The power that community outreach can have on the lives of people and communities is incomprehensible and is ever lasting. I cannot speak for every company, but I can firmly state that the Mitteldeutscher Basketball Club and the New York Knicks both do their part to positively better people's lives, strengthen communities, and promoting healthy living. In return, they are thanked by having life-long fans and a stronger brand name, pretty good deal for both sides of the equation if you ask me.

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Photos

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